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SUBJECT: JAPAN-CHINA PANEL SEEKS TO DEPOLITICIZE HISTORY

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer per 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: The Japan-China Joint Historical Research Committee, formed in October 2006, will complete and publish this summer a two-volume report containing the views of each side on several historical periods from ancient times until the present. The goal of the committee is not to produce a joint history text, but rather to "depoliticize history" and begin development of an objective understanding of events between Japan and China, according to the the Japanese team head and Tokyo University professor. Controversial topics such as the Nanjing massacre will not be ignored, but nor will they be given special emphasis. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Japan and China agreed in October 2006 to establish the Japan-China Joint Historical Research Committee, the goal of which is to begin development of an objective understanding about the long history between Japan and China. The committee, which consists of ten prominent academics and other representatives from Japan and the PRC, has met three times since December 2006; the most recent meeting was held in Beijing earlier this month.

13. (C) As Shinichi Kitaoka -- the head of the Japanese team and professor of law and politics at Tokyo University -- told Embassy Tokyo, the goal of the joint history project is not, as many believe, to produce a joint textbook. Instead, the Japan-China committee will produce a two-volume report containing Japanese and Chinese explanations of the same discrete historical periods, as well as summaries of the two sides' discussions about where their views and interpretations differ. The committee has been divided into two sub-committees, with one focusing on the historical events prior to the Opium Wars and the other sub-committee examining events following the Opium War and leading up until the present, Kitaoka explained.

14. (C) The Chinese had initially been reluctant to include post-World War II history in the project's ambit, Kitaoka continued, citing "confusion" about the PRC's Cultural Revolution. In the committee meeting earlier this month, the Japanese side pressed to include postwar history because Japan's peaceful development over the past 60 years is a necessary counterpoint to wartime and pre-war history; ultimately, the Chinese side agreed, Kitaoka said. The Japanese members also suggested, and the Chinese agreed, that the committee not place "special emphasis" on the Nanjing massacre and other specific historical events; these events will instead be treated as part of the "flow of history."

15. (C) Kitaoka said he expects the committee to meet one more

time, perhaps in June or July, to complete and publish the two volumes. The first of the project's two volumes will include 16 essays -- eight from each country -- on ancient history to the Opium Wars. The second volume will have 18 essays -- nine from each side -- and be divided into several parts: from the Opium Wars to the Manchurian Incident (1931); from the Manchurian Incident to the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (1937); from the Marco Polo Bridge Incident to the conclusion of World War II; and from the end of WWII to the present. The second volume will also present each side's views on the current status of history education in both Japan and China.

¶16. (C) Perhaps someday, the committee or one of its successors will be in a position to produce a joint history text, Kitaoka said (adding that he hopes to step down and focus on other projects once the committee submits its product later this year). For the present, however, the committee's main aim is to "depoliticize history," and therefore his expectations for the committee's achievements are modest. "Politicians should discuss the present and the future, and leave the study of history to historians," he said.

¶17. (C) Comment: Interestingly, Kitaoka's comment about leaving history to the historians (as opposed to politicians) has been repeated a number of times to Embassy Tokyo by Diet members on both sides of aisle, including up-and-coming conservative standard bearer Yasuhide Nakayama. Hopefully this will augur well for the depoliticization, if not disappearance, of the history issue in Sino-Japanese relations. End Comment.  
SCHIEFFER